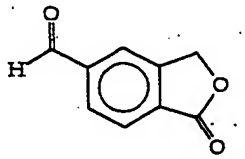
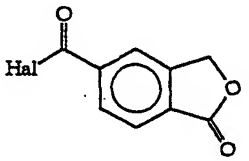
CLAIMS

1. A process for the preparation of 5-formylphthalide of formula



(I)

which comprises submitting a halide of formula



(II)

wherein Hal represents chlorine, bromine or iodine, dissolved in a dipolar aprotic solvent, to hydrogenation.

2. The process of claim 1, wherein said dipolar aprotic solvent is selected from the group consisting of N,N-dimethylformamide (DMF), N,N-dimethylacetamide (DMA) dimethylsulfoxide (DMSO) and acetonitrile.

3. The process of claim 2 wherein said dipolar aprotic solvent is N,N-dimethyl acetamide.

4. The process of claim 1 wherein the hydrogenation is carried out in the presence of a hydrogenation catalyst.

5. The process of claim 4 wherein said hydrogenation catalyst is palladium on charcoal (Pd/C) or on barium sulphate ($Pd/BaSO_4$).

6. The process of claim 4 wherein said hydrogenation catalyst is used, compared to the halide of formula II in a weight/ weight ratio comprised between 0.2:1 and 0.05:1, preferably of about 0.1:1.

7. The process of claim 1 wherein the halide of formula II is the 5-chlorocarbonyl phthalide.

8. The process of claim 1 wherein the concentration of the halide of formula II is comprised between 60 and 80 g/l, preferably of about 70 g/l.

9. The process of claim 1 wherein the hydrogenation is carried out at a pressure between 1 and 5 bar, preferably between 2.5 and 3.5 bar.

10. The process of claim 1 wherein the hydrogenation is carried out at a temperature comprised between room temperature and 120°C, preferably between 40 and 80°C.

11. Use of 5-formylphthalide as intermediate in the preparation of citalopram.